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Statement of purpose

Taking stock of the universe of positions and goals that constitutes leftist politics today, we are left with the disquieting suspicion that a deep commonality underlies the apparent variety: What exists today is built upon the desiccated remains of what was once possible.

In order to make sense of the present, we find it necessary to disentangle the vast accumulation of positions on the Left and to evaluate their saliency for the possible reconstitution of emancipatory politics in the present. Doing this implies a reconsideration of what is meant by the Left.

Our task begins from what we see as the general disenchantment with the present state of progressive politics. We feel that this disenchantment cannot be cast off by sheer will, by simply "carrying on the fight," but must be addressed and itself made an object of critique. Thus we begin with what immediately confronts us.

The *Platypus Review* is motivated by its sense that the Left is disoriented. We seek to be a forum among a variety of tendencies and approaches on the Left—not out of a concern with inclusion for its own sake, but rather to provoke disagreement and to open shared goals as sites of contestation. In this way, the recriminations and accusations arising from political disputes of the past may be harnessed to the project of clarifying the object of leftist critique.

The *Platypus Review* hopes to create and sustain a space for interrogating and clarifying positions and orientations currently represented on the Left, a space in which questions may be raised and discussions pursued that would not otherwise take place. As long as submissions exhibit a genuine commitment to this project, all kinds of content will be considered for publication.

Submission guidelines
Articles will typically range in length from 750–4,500 words, but longer pieces will be considered. Please send article submissions and inquiries about this project to: *review_editor@platypus1917.org*. All submissions should conform to the *Chicago Manual of Style*.

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The Platypus Review

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"Trotskyists drew a line at supporting the Democrats"

An interview with Wayne Price

Spencer A. Leonard

The following is an edited transcript of an interview with Wayne Price conducted on September 14th, 2019. Wayne Price is a former member of the International Socialists and the author of The Abolition of the State: Anarchist & Marxist Perspectives, Anarchism & Socialism: Reformism or Revolution? *and* Value of Radical Theory: An Anarchist Introduction to Marx's Critique of Political Economy.

Spencer Leonard: Let's begin at the beginning. How were you first politicized? When did that occur and what were your main motivations? What questions or events exercised you then?

Wayne Price: Well, I grew up in the anti-Vietnam War movement. That's what affected everybody. I'm proud that in high school a friend and I sought out a group of anti-war activists around David McReynolds and the War Resisters League and gave out leaflets on the street in New York opposing U.S. intervention in Vietnam, with quotations from Senator Mike Mansfield stating how it was wrong to get involved. That must have been 1964. Nobody had even heard of Vietnam at that point.

SL: And after high school you began to get involved in more organized activity?

WP: Yes. I grew up in a liberal household. My parents had friends who were former Communists. So, while not quite a red-diaper baby, I was sort of a pink-diaper baby. I read *I. F. Stone's Weekly* and the like. In high school my friends and I discovered anarchism, particularly Paul Goodman, the most well-known anarchist at the time. Also, Dwight Macdonald and Erich Fromm, the humanistic Marxist. My mother had Erich Fromm's *The Sane Society* on her shelf, which was Fromm's most radical book. In addition, we were in touch with some anarchist pacifists in New York City. We participated in the 1962 "Worldwide General Strike for Peace." It meant nothing much, but we wore armbands.

I stayed influenced by this sort of politics up until college, where I got involved with Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) at Queen's College in New York City. There I met Jeff Mackler, who was a leader of the Socialist Workers Party's Young Socialist Alliance. (Today, he's the head of the Socialist Action political group.) The Socialist Workers Party (SWP) was then the biggest Trotskyist group in the U.S. Mackler talked me out of anarchist pacifism, arguing that there are some issues that must be fought out. If the Nazis had taken power, they would have crushed any non-violent movement. Respecting anarchism, he gave me literature on the 1956 Hungarian Revolution and the 1936–39 Spanish Civil War that argued that the workers' councils and other associations democratically replaced the liberal bourgeois state. I agreed with replacing the bourgeois state with associations of councils and still believe in that, but I wouldn't call it a state. So I became a sort of Trotskyist, although, much to Mackler's dismay, I did not join the SWP. Because I thought the talk about the Soviet Union being somehow a "workers' state," despite the fact that the workers had not a smidgen of power, was just absurd. It was supposed to be a workers' state just because they had nationalized industry. So I joined the left Shachtmanites, the group influenced by Hal Draper, though I didn't meet him for a long time.

SL: Were the Independent Socialist Club (ISC) in competition with the SWP on campus?

WP: They were off campus, in New York City. I wrote to them and met Sy Landy and other leaders of the group. As I said, I had been persuaded by Mackler to a sort of Trotskyist perspective, but couldn't accept their exact position. So I asked, "Well, who else is there who says something similar?" Then I came across Draper's writings in the *New Politics* magazine, including "The Two Souls of Socialism" and his "Socialism from Below."[1] I thought, "I agree with that! Is anybody advocating that?"

Landy was the founder of the New York group. I did not have contact with the team on the West Coast where the ISC first started until they had a conference, the one at which they formed the Independent Socialist Clubs of America. That's when I saw Draper for the first time.

SL: That was in 1967?

WP: Yes. I remember Draper advocating our siding with the National Liberation Front against U.S. imperialism — not politically, not supporting the Stalinist leadership, but being on the side of the people. I found that persuasive.

SL: As you understood it at that time, what was the Shachtmanite legacy that needed upholding even against Shachtman himself?

WP: I didn't know much at the beginning, of course, and I never agreed with the bureaucratic collectivism theory as opposed to state capitalism. I had read Raya Dunayevskaya's book *Marxism and Freedom* and I was persuaded on that point. But I agreed with supporting neither side in the Cold War, being for working-class revolution, and rejecting both the bureaucracy of the Soviet Union and the U.S. ruling class. That's the stuff I agreed with. I was persuaded of the working-class perspective, as I still am. During the Cold War it was very hard for people not to take sides: the orthodox Trotskyists taking the side of the Soviet Union, and Shachtman and the social democrats eventually siding with American imperialism. Small groups of anarchists, radical pacifists, unconventional Trotskyists, and libertarian Marxists did not. So I was drawn to that general milieu.

SL: You believe that these different groups recognized their affinity even in the 1950s. Did you sense any kind of overlap between Draperite left Shachtmanism and the pacifism and anarchism to which you had originally been attracted?

WP: Yes, I felt that my values were the same. I saw the overlap. Some things, such as strategy, were different, but other areas — opposition to nuclear armament, opposition to both sides during the Cold War, anti-imperialism, working-class revolution — were similar.

SL: What do you think Draper was trying to achieve with the ISCs? My sense is that he withdrew from politics altogether when he withdrew from the Socialist Party in the early 60s, only to be drawn back into politics by the student movement. Of course, in Berkeley Draper helped to build the New Left, but was he perhaps inspired by it as well? What was the ISC strategy in terms of intersecting SDS and the emerging generation of leftists?

WP: I know from my reading that he was critical of the Independent Socialist League dissolving into the Socialist Party in 1958, not in the abstract, but because he knew that Shachtman was going to move to the right. I know from reading memoirs that Sy Landy was in favor of putting up a fight about it, but Draper just gave up at a certain point. More left-wing types inside the Young People's Socialist League had joined the orthodox Trotskyists back in 1958.

SL: You mean the people who went on to form the Spartacist League?

WP: Yes, Robertson and those people. That's their history. They were won over to orthodox Trotskyism.

SL: The movement against the Vietnam War was a massive influence in politicizing an entire generation. That and the civil rights movement. Some Trotskyists uncritically celebrated and supported the regimes in Cuba and Vietnam. Arguably, an anti-imperialist impulse overrode all other considerations, so that decolonization and anti-imperialism drove a lot of people to Stalinism in your generation. How did reflection on imperialism as it was posed in the 60s and 70s presented not just a recruiting and clarification opportunity for the New Left, but an obstacle for it?

WP: On the one hand, the Vietnam War exposed the United States government. Here we had a more-or-less liberal Democratic president and government, and it was massacring peasants and poor people in faraway countries with all kinds of bullshit explanations. The liberals either supported the war or waffled about it. After all, it was their government. That led to a massive

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Harrington and David McReynolds arguing that). At the time I thought that Harrington's argument was correct: Goldwater had to be defeated. I was too young to vote, but I saw what happened, how Johnson escalated the war in Vietnam. So, in retrospect, I decided the anti-electoralists were right. That was another reason why I went looking for the ISC. They had some high-level intellectual discussions, particularly after 1968. I was a schoolteacher at the time of the 1968 New York City Teachers' Strike. I crossed the picket line to support community control. I felt that the union was taking a racist position. I wasn't happy about crossing the picket line and thought that both sides had problems, but the union took a bad stance on this. I still think that's true. The Shachtmanites, Michael Harrington and Bayard Rustin, supported the striking teachers. The people who became the LaRouchites did too. But most of the Left did not. Most were on the side of the black population.

SL: How did the ISC develop you as a young recruit?

WP: Well, that's hard to remember. I didn't experience the events on the West Coast. For example, in the Free Speech Movement the ISC made an impact. The ISC had forums on the Hungarian Revolution. Shachtman went out there for what was supposed to have been a great speech. Then there was the Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba, which is when they finally made their final break with Shachtman. He semi-supported the U.S. invasion of Cuba.[2]

Meeting and talking with people, discussing politics, educated me. The ISC had no separate educational group.

For me personally, the 1964 election had a big impact. I read the literature in *New Politics* magazine and *Liberation* on the election. Goldwater's campaign was the beginning of the far-right capture of the Republican Party. Some said we should support Johnson, that that could lead to a Democratic reorientation toward the workers, the poor, and civil rights (I recall Michael Harrington and David McReynolds arguing that). At the time I thought that Harrington's argument was correct:

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radicalization. Towards the end of the war, polls showed that up to one million Americans identified themselves as revolutionaries. On the other hand, anti-imperialism led to unclarity as to what you wanted for a revolution — what was the goal? People were uncritical of totalitarian regimes. The orthodox Trotskyists (the SWP) committed themselves entirely to Castro, giving up their historical perspective of saying that they supported the regimes, but supported overthrowing them for more democratic regimes. They gave up on that and became simply cheerleaders for Castro and, in fact, for the Vietnamese, even though the North Vietnamese had a history of massacring Trotskyists. So, the question was, "What are you for? What's your vision?" It was muddled. We would talk to people and say, "Well, you say you're Marxist; we say we're Marxist. To Marx the central thing was the struggle of the working class to establish proletarian democracy." They didn't give a shit. They wanted something like Vietnam, Cuba, or China (not so much Russia, because they thought Russia was somehow different). That made it difficult to be on the libertarian left. The Revolutionary Socialist League (RSL) was smaller than even the International Socialists, which became quite large in recent decades, up until now with the collapse of the International Socialists (ISO) into the Democratic Socialists of America.

SL: Though I know you had long since gone a different way, how did the 2019 collapse of the ISO into the DSA strike you? How do you see its trajectory in terms of its growth in the 1990s and the 2000s, then this collapse? Is it tragic that there is no organizational legacy of left Shachtmanism today?

WP: Part of the growth of the ISO in the United States was the discrediting of Stalinism with the collapse of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, and the transformation of China to being openly pro-capitalist, even though it is still run by a Communist Party. This led to a decline of the pro-Stalinist wing of Marxism, including orthodox Trotskyism. The Socialist Workers Party vanished into a sectarian authoritarian group. So, there was an opening.

It also had to do with the growth of anarchism, because of Marxism being discredited to a degree. Parallel to this was the growth of Third Camp, socialism-from-below, or what I would call left social-democratic tendencies. So the ISO became the big tent, influenced both by Draper, but also by the British Cliffite tradition. They melded together and grew to become a major far-left group, up until this recent upsurge of socialism, which has been channeled into the DSA and, to a degree, into the Democratic Party. On the specific issue of whether the ISO handled the accusations of sexual abuse and so forth properly, which is a real issue, it doesn't seem to have been handled very well. But the major issue was the pull towards social democracy, towards "democratic socialism." That affected all the socialist groups. The DSA even has an anarchist caucus for God's sake! So, nobody could withstand it. The big difference between the Trotskyists and the Stalinists had been that the Trotskyists, even when they moved to the right, drew a line at supporting the Democratic Party. They might support a third capitalist party, but they would not join the Democrats. Now they have merged into them.

SL: How do you think that social democracy absorbed the upsurge of anarchism that we saw with anti-globalization in the '90s and, later, with Occupy?

WP: Well, those who wanted to be radical and felt most offended by this system did not want to go towards Stalinism, "Marxism" as they saw it. The only alternative was either to become some militant democratic socialist or to become an anarchist. So it is part of the rejection of Stalinism. Probably most anarchists these days have some kind of reformist perspective of building new institutions that will gradually take over the system. There is a lot of reformism arising from the general rejection of authoritarianism.

SL: So, to go back: In 1969 you were part of the founding conference of the International Socialists?

WP: Yes. After the 1969 split convention of the SDS, a group of radicals around Ron Tabor, Chris Hobson, and some others split off because they rejected Stalinism and Maoism. They had been at arm's length from the ISC, because of the Shachtmanite legacy. They decided this was no longer significant and agreed to join, merging with the ISC to form the International Socialists. I was happy to participate in that.

Tabor's group had formed the Revolutionary Socialist Caucus inside the SDS. They were a minority group that tried to build themselves, but were swamped by the split between Progressive Labor (PL), on the one hand, and, on the other, the various Maoists — what became the Weathermen, the Revolutionary Communist Party, etc. The IS tried to build its own pole of attraction for militants who did not want to be any kind of Maoist or orthodox Trotskyist.

SL: Then, within five years, the IS itself was split and the man who had inspired you to join that tradition in the first place, Hal Draper, had dropped out of it, indeed out of politics altogether. Why do you think Draper in the early 1970s walked away from what he had helped to build? How was that perceived within the IS at the time?

WP: He ended up focusing on research, writing his books on Karl Marx and politics. From what I gather from the writings at the time, he became disgruntled with the anti-union perspective that developed among some members of the IS. People were trying to grapple with how to relate to the working class, how to be pro-union while opposing the bureaucracy. How do revolutionary socialists both say what we believe and participate in the ongoing struggles, which, after all, tended to be very low-level? People were grappling with this and some became fairly anti-union. Draper seems to have just gotten fed up. He wrote some essays on that, which you have probably seen: the "Reorient Papers." He persuaded himself that he could start a center that would put out literature, but that it was wrong to build a political organization. Part of this came out of the Shachtmanite tradition of saying, "Well, what counts is getting the working class moving. This will inevitably develop towards socialist consciousness." That downplayed the need for consciousness being deliberately developed, the need for a revolutionary organization. And he was probably tired, I would guess.

SL: Was it a debate about party building? Was he essentially agnostic as to when the working class would demand the formation of a socialist party?

WP: Well, only a very small group of people agreed with him on this. The focus was not over party building, but unions. Nobody formed a caucus hostile to working in the unions. Our main perspective remained that we should stay inside unions and inside the working class. We thought that we should try to build groupings that were both inside and outside the unions. The Draperites disagreed with that. They wanted to say, "Why not caucus inside unions?" It was really unclear. People were trying things out, trying to experiment and build. Draper's perspective remained (and he interpreted Marx as saying) that the movement itself would sort of take care of things, that the movement would become revolutionary if you just helped it along a bit.

SL: The ISC had a working-class orientation even within SDS. How distinctive was that?

WP: It was fairly distinctive. The PL also had such a perspective, though they did not quite know how to deal with it. During summers you could leave college and go and work for the summer. In that process, you would learn how to talk with workers. That was PL's perspective. In general, the Maoists developed more of a working-class approach than did the Trotskyists. Still, the IS was a pioneer in making efforts to go to the working class and to participate in working-class struggles directly.

SL: When you look back on it, how do you understand the opportunity of your generation, the opportunity of the New Left? Was it missed or not? Are there gains to point to? How do you assess that?

WP: It's a mixed bag. Certainly, there were gains. The consciousness and the culture were both affected. For quite a while after the Vietnam War, it was harder for the United States to undertake military interventions. This is what the bourgeoisie call the "Vietnam Syndrome." In addition, the civil rights movement smashed legal segregation, which was no small victory. And other things followed from that — particularly the women's movement and the gay movement. But these also just represent a general loosening of culture and morals, which was a good thing in many ways. On the other hand, it was all limited.

SL: None of those things are counted by people today as the gains of socialism or as part of a project of socialism. They are just viewed as the gains of the Democrats or the advance of liberalism.

WP: Well, all these gains are under attack, but I see your point. Let me say this, there were certain objective factors that limited the movement. The general prosperity of the 1950s and '60s limited the intervention of the working class. One thing that made it difficult for our perspective was not only the attraction of Stalinist revolutionaries, but the lack of a working-class struggle in the United States. That came by the 1970s somewhat, with the unionization of the healthcare industry and public employees, some wildcat strikes and so forth, but it was still limited. Then there was the fact that the Left had won victories: Jim Crow was abolished, and the Vietnam War ended. With the war over, the draft stopped. All those things made it difficult, even though by around 1970 the long postwar boom was over. Those were all objective limitations.

SL: Were those objective limitations or were they, in a sense, limitations of leftist consciousness? It seems to me that these are examples of the Left underestimating capitalism: capitalism can't deliver prosperity; capitalism can't overcome Jim Crow; capitalism can't stop its wars — but it proved able to do all those things.

WP: Well, yes, except the prosperity did end. We're now in the post-prosperity period and a lot of people are still at the bottom of society. And we're still engaged in wars.

SL: I'm not trying to celebrate capitalism. I'm simply saying that the way history unfolded blindsided the Left.

WP: Yes. It's an underestimation of the resilience of capitalism, as well as an underestimation of its weakness. Nobody predicted that there would be an end to the postwar prosperity. They hadn't predicted postwar prosperity, but once it happened they assumed that it would go on indefinitely. Anyway, to go back to your earlier point, a key factor was Stalinism. The failure to pose an alternate vision of a different kind of society, of freedom, to make freedom an essential part of the vision of the Left — this was a certain limitation. After all, are you going to tell the workers, "We are going to do to you what Stalin did to the Russian workers or what Mao did to the Chinese workers?" All that put a limit on the Left and discouraged people. That's a reason why, when the movement develops again as is happening now, or in the 1970s–80s, it takes a more libertarian-democratic perspective that ranges from social democracy to anarchism.

SL: To come back to the issue of party and politics, you went through the abortive founding of the Peace and Freedom Party in 1968. Retrospectively, you described it as a middle-class party initiative and asked, "Why did the U.S. really need another capitalist party?" So, what kind of strategy was involved there. The PFP aside, how were people in the IS thinking about the development of a political movement for socialism in the United States? Specifically, how did that figure into the Revolutionary Socialist League's split with the IS?

WP: Draper's method was "one step to the Left" — let's move things a bit to the Left, and a bit more to the Left, and eventually you get to socialism. Get a movement going and it will get there with just a little bit of our — I wouldn't say manipulation — influence. That was their perspective. They hoped to build out of the mass anti-war and black movements an independent political party that would break with the Democrats. This would eventually lead to a labor party or some kind of working-class party that would in turn lead to a socialist party, which would eventually lead to a revolutionary socialist party. It was step-to-step-to-step. Actually, things don't necessarily develop that way. Sometimes they develop by great leaps.

Draper himself, if you read his earliest writings back in the 1930s, opposed the labor party slogan and program of the Trotskyists. The reason he gave was that a labor party, developing at a time of mass upsurge, would serve as a barrier for developing a revolutionary party. A labor party in its personnel and its program would in fact be no different from a liberal third party or third capitalist party, which the Trotskyists were against. It would have the same union bureaucrats, liberal politicians, and community leaders, and they would take on a reformist program. But, by the 1960s, he kept the analysis but flipped his position, probably due to discouragement. Obviously, the country was nowhere near a revolutionary perspective. So, we said, "Well, the Peace and Freedom Party's liberal third-party program is no different than what a labor party's would be, therefore we should support it, though it doesn't fit the class criteria." He flipped over but kept the analysis. I could agree with the analysis, but I wouldn't flip over. In practice, it was no different than a liberal party, and could only develop in a situation of mass upheaval, where it would serve to misdirect the movement in a reformist and electoralist direction.

SL: And the RSL in the 1970s was raising the demand for a labor party?

WP: Yes, they advocated for a revolutionary program. It did not accept a third-party liberal perspective. That was wrong in retrospect, and the group that split off from us raised it as a criticism, calling instead for general strikes or non-parliamentary direct action. But yes, formally we were for a labor party. When the impeachment was raised for Nixon we said, "Yes, impeach him and replace him with a workers' government" — that was our slogan.

SL: Did this differentiate the RSL from the IS? What were the issues in that split?

WP: The issues were really — how can I summarize it? — a matter of seriousness, a willingness to openly say we were for revolution. The IS itself was a very mixed bag. It had no clear theory. It never critiqued what happened to Shachtmanism, the method of the one-step-to-the-left approach, why that was wrong. It sent people into industry but tended to support liberal opposition caucuses without criticizing them in any way in the unions. This came to a head in the discussion of the Miners for Democracy in the miners' union, where they became essentially cheerleaders for Arnold Miller and the liberal opposition. Our grouping said, yes, we should support it, but we should also criticize it, stating openly in our literature that there is no solution short of a revolutionary perspective. That became the dividing line and a major issue.

SL: Would you describe both of these as rank-and-file strategies?

WP: Yes and no. Our criticism was of pure rank-and-file-ism. We said it was not enough to mobilize and get the rank-and-file moving, (though, again, this is how Draper interpreted Marx). You have to also be saying that those who become the revolutionary minority should organize themselves and try to persuade other people of a revolutionary perspective. It's not enough to say, well, if the rank and file move, that makes things more militant, more democratic, etc. You need a revolutionary perspective, and, if you can organize for it, you should say so. This is the part that I continue to believe that we saw in Lenin and Trotskyism, this idea of "saying what is" when organizing. What I came to reject when I became an anarchist was the idea that this revolutionary organizational tendency should aim to take power for itself, to rule over the people and become the new bosses.

SL: From your perspective today, is it necessary to form a political party for socialism? I know that you argue against electoralism and against an organization that aims for state power. Do you reject the whole question of the democratic struggle and "the battle for democracy," as Marx calls it in the *Manifesto*? How do you conduct that battle?

WP: I do not reject the idea that revolutionary socialists who agree with each other, in my case who agree on a basic socialist-anarchist perspective, should organize themselves into a collective grouping in order to coordinate their activities, undertake joint activities, and educate themselves. This perspective goes way back in anarchism to Bakunin's Alliance for Socialist Democracy. Marx in fact opposed the anarchists because they built a political caucus inside the International. He objected to that and demanded that Bakunin disband the Alliance. The disagreement is, like I said, that this should be the party to take power in the name of the workers or to take the place of the workers, to build a new state. I define a state not as any kind of association or federation of workers' councils and other mass organizations, but as a bureaucratic-military, socially alienated machine standing over and above society (which is a perfectly good Marxist definition of the state). I don't agree with the goal of a state so defined, but I agree with the need to organize the working class and oppressed for self-management and self-liberation.

Regarding the battle for democracy, don't forget that when Marx was saying that, when he wrote the *Communist Manifesto*, he expected them to take over the British state as it was. Later, Engels published a preface saying, "What we learned since then and changed in our program, is that you can't use the existing state. We learned from the Paris Commune in 1871 that we have to smash the existing state and replace it." I agree with that perspective. Unfortunately, what Marx did after the Paris Commune was to wage a major campaign inside the International for every local to form a political party to try to get elected to power in the existing states. That was the main issue in the split between the Marxists and the anarchists, whether the parties should get elected in different states. I don't agree with Marx on that. I don't think it's realistic. I don't think you can use the existing state to move towards socialism. All history has demonstrated that.

SL: Would you say that Hal Draper had misgivings about Marx's stated goal of the dictatorship of the proletariat and the way that it was taken up within Marxism? Did you, Tabor, and others extend Draper's skepticism towards Marxism to include Marx and Engels themselves?

WP: No, such a statement would be grossly unfair, because Draper wrote one of his major books on Marx's concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Far from disagreeing with Marx, Draper said that what Marx meant by it, in the eleven or twelve times Marx or Engels used the phrase, was not the formation of a particular kind of authoritarian state, but rather the taking of power by the workers, a "workers' state," by which Marx meant more or less a radically democratic state. Another of Draper's books criticizes the prevailing interpretations of "dictatorship," whereby it came to mean the rule of a minority in a particular type of state. He never reinvented Marx on this, but rather defended Marx's democratic conception. Draper abandoned the phrase "dictatorship of the proletariat" for our time, of course, but he never meant that as a criticism of Marx.

I would criticize Marx for his notion of the workers taking power democratically. Marx's notion seemed to be a very democratic form of *representative democracy* even in his most libertarian writings on, say, the Paris Commune. He had no conception of *direct democracy*, of people directly deciding things, whether in the neighborhood or the workplace. They have delegates passing decision-making on to higher levels, but this should be rooted in direct, face-to-face democracy — Marx has no conception of this (neither did Draper). That is my criticism of Marx. I don't believe he was totalitarian, certainly Draper never thought so. Draper criticized the followers of Marx: The only ones he doesn't see as distorting Marx's thinking and taking it in an authoritarian direction were Rosa Luxemburg and William Morris.

SL: Do you think there is an ambiguity within Marx that was realized within Marxism?

WP: Yes. That I do believe. There are authoritarian aspects of Marxism. One is the program, the idea of workers taking over the state, either being elected to the existing state or overthrowing it and establishing their own state as a centralized machine. Even in the *Communist Manifesto*, when he talks about the state withering away, he expects it to be replaced by some kind of centralized, but not political, institution. That is the immediate thing. If you focus on taking over the state and building state power, it's not surprising if you end up with social democracy and Stalinism. The other problem is more philosophical, the deterministic or teleological aspect, the idea that socialism and revolution is inevitable. This is ambivalent in Marx. He says this a lot and he says the opposite. He says at least the equivalent of the "socialism or barbarism" conception. Even the *Communist Manifesto*, for example, ends by saying socialism and revolution is inevitable, after beginning by saying that sometimes class struggle ends in the common defeat of both classes. There is a powerfully democratic aspect of Marxism, which I still believe in and which Draper focused on, but the authoritarian aspects are what became the dominant tendency. That's part of the argument: if Marx was so democratic, then how come his followers end up as social democrats and then as Stalinist totalitarians? Certainly, objective factors pressured development in that direction, but what was there in Marxism that lent itself to these interpretations?

SL: To defend Marx and Marxism, one might say that the fundamental ambiguities or, rather, contradictions arise from, in a sense, capitalism itself, given that the question is one of overcoming capitalism on the basis of capitalism itself, that the project is to push capitalism's own innermost tendencies, and that includes, ultimately, realizing proletarian society in order overcome it.

WP: Well, if that means we recognize whatever capitalism has, and start from where we are, I can't disagree with that. But capitalism's drive to centralization, is a capitalist drive. It does not produce in this way because this is the most effective way of producing useful goods. No. Capitalism is not geared for producing use-values, but for producing surplus-value, and the most effective way to produce surplus-value isn't necessarily the most effective way to produce useful goods. This is, again, an old discussion about technology. We see right now some of Marx's critics, the "communizers," saying, "now it's become hard to organize workers precisely because capitalism has been turning against the large industries, the large factories, and trying to produce smaller factories in order to weaken the working class." And, of course, capitalism can produce in small enterprises, small workshops and factories. They coordinate and centralize through the internet and other means of mass communication. It is not necessarily true that centralized methods are the most effective in terms of, again, producing useful goods. In fact, the effects, the side-effects of capitalist forms of production have been disastrous, as everyone knows, in terms of ecology and the climate.

We have to start wherever we are: if we have big factories, then the workers should take them over; small factories, take them over. We must learn how to coordinate them, how to re-tool and reorganize them, to generate a more democratic, creative, ecologically balanced form of technology. We can't just argue that, since capitalism centralizes, we want a centralized system. A coordinated system, yes. There is going to have to be some kind of democratic planning from below, coordination from many different sides, which is, in fact, more possible than ever before.

SL: In your article for the *Platypus Review,* you wrote that it's "wrong to claim that anarchists believe 'the state is the source and origin of all evil,' as distinct from the exploitative class system and other forms of oppression. But it is certainly true that anarchists are opposed to the state (as part of the overall system of domination) and reject the Marxist program of a 'transitional' or 'workers' state."[3] You mention that the person that you're polemicizing against, Herb Gamberg, "correctly

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quotes Bakunin as predicting that a revolution constructs 'a powerfully centralized revolutionary state that would inevitably result in military dictatorship and a new master.'"[4] But doesn't the question that Marx would pose turn on the relationship of the state and society under capital? Isn't the bonapartist state, the capitalist state, with its basis in modern democracy, symptomatic of the self-contradiction of society? Is it not the case that the state emerges to manage the contradictions of society? That is where I feel like the real question between anarchists and Marxists lies.

WP: Well, yes and no. I certainly agree that the state derives out of capitalism, or previous forms of class society. I've written a whole series of essays, in fact, arguing this with other anarchists, arguing for a class analysis of the state.[5] I argue there that mine is the perspective that the original anarchists, the classical anarchists, had — Kropotkin, Bakunin, and so on.

The question is program. Because the state is based on divisions in society and it exists to serve to hold society together; in a society in which a minority rules you have to hold down the majority. In the event of an overthrow of the state, of smashing the bourgeois state, too, there needs to be central coordination. The various workers' councils and committees, local assemblies, and popular militias need to coordinate with each other, to federate with each other. This requires various degrees of centralization, various kinds of coordination and conflict-resolution, especially given the immediate need to repress counterrevolutionaries. I agree completely. As you may know, during the Spanish Revolution the Friends of Durruti Group came to advocate something like that. The question is, is this a state? Should it be a separate institution standing above and over the rest of society? That's what we disagree with, committing yourself to building a state. Because it is no longer a minority ruling over the majority, but the self-organization of a large majority of the population and is therefore qualitatively different from any kind of state that's ever existed. No matter how democratic the bourgeois revolution was, a socialist revolution would be altogether unlike that. Because it would be in the name of the vast majority, the authoritarian ("statist") aspects of coordinating associations will tend to wither away. But I am not denying there will be authoritarian aspects; there will always be some kind of structures, some kind of conflict-resolution, and so forth. That's not the question. Most anarchists would agree with that. We are talking about radical democracy rather than total individualist freedom.

SL: What about the tradition within anarchism that points beyond or criticizes democracy, that distinguishes the goal of anarchy from "democracy"?

WP: This was one of Draper's arguments against anarchists, that they reject democracy. And the truth is that there is disagreement, theoretically, among anarchists. We have recently — I have been part of debates on democracy: those who reject it and those who are for it — those who see anarchism as rejecting democracy, and don't see anarchism, as I do, as the most extreme form of democracy, as democracy without the state. Particularly those tending towards individualism tend to reject it, although, in fact, many of those who reject democracy really mean that they reject *bourgeois* democracy, *representative* democracy, which exists under capitalism. Instead of democracy they talk about self-management, autogestion and various terms that amount to democracy but are not using the word "democracy". There is a very strong tradition that sees anarchism as extreme democracy. That tradition includes some in the United States — David Graeber, Paul Goodman, Noam Chomsky, Murray Bookchin, Cindy Milstein, and other well-known anarchists who have different points of view on anarchism, but nevertheless are all in favor of total democracy. So, it's a question. Certainly, Bakunin's position, going back to democracy, is not individualist. For him, it is a question of having to be part of a group — that human beings are social and social self-determination is essential for any kind of freedom. So yes, it's an issue. And those who reject democracy talk as though social self-determination could be a choice rather than something we have to do. Then there are those like me who believe strongly that anarchism is the radical fulfilment of participatory democracy.

SL: I feel that Marx and Lenin agree that the goal is not the rule of the people but the rule of nobody. They agree with Enlightenment liberalism and anarchism on the goal being a world in which the freedom of each would be the basis of the freedom of all.

WP: I love that slogan. A society where everyone rules is a society where no one rules: everybody is involved in making decisions, there's no separate institution above people. I think of it not as the end of democracy, but as the expansion of it. There will always be some kind of collective decision-making. Whether it's like what we did in the workshop this morning, where the workers get together in the morning and decide how to make things, or have people in the neighborhood making decisions about what consumption goods they want to order from the overall planning process, there can be no end of democracy or collective decision-making. It will always continue. I'd call a self-regulating society democracy. There's bound to be clashes and disagreements: there will never be a perfect society. But, as to the goal, you can say that's what Marx had in mind, although, as I said, he has a centralist perspective. He never saw face-to-face democracy as good for society. In the *Communist Manifesto*, he said that the state will be replaced by or evolve into an institution that plans the production of goods. As Engels put it, it will administer things rather than people — as though you can make that distinction! The problem is do you achieve self-regulating society by building, by taking over a state? If your focus is on building a state, then you end up with a state! If you assume that the withering away bit is going to happen by itself, then it never does! Our program should be as follows: To the extent that there are any centralized or authoritarian aspects to social coordination, which we would try to keep to a minimum, you work at decreasing them and reorganizing them. Reorganizing them in a more decentralized direction, where the working people make their decisions without distinction between order-givers and order-takers. Lenin in *The State and Revolution* said the workers' state won't even really be a state, because it will be a state of a different sort which will immediately start to wither away. The problem is that, first, in Lenin's view this was in the context of the economy being centralized on the model of the Prussian post office or wartime Germany's centralized economy. Secondly, the problem was that he took power and established a one-party police state, laying the basis for Stalinist totalitarianism. That said, I don't reject Marxism. Marxism overlaps with revolutionary anarchism in its belief in the need for a working-class revolution. We should agree on other certain key aspects, particularly Marx's critique of political economy, which is very useful and necessary for understanding what's happening in the world today. Another area of agreement is historical materialism as a general philosophy, if you leave out the determinism. There are major areas in which I agree with libertarian-humanistic Marxism. I've been criticized for that. There are other people from the old RSL who want to reject Marxism totally.

SL: If we're thinking in the longue durée, a century ago millions imminently anticipated a socialist revolution. Your generation at least had living contact with those who had that experience, whereas people nowadays are far more convinced of the imminence of ecological catastrophe than they are of socialism. What do you see as the challenges facing the project of reconstituting the Left in this generation, as opposed to the challenges your generation faced?

WP: First of all, it's become impossible to argue that socialism is inevitable. Clearly, it's not. We face possible destruction, whether through ecological climate catastrophe or war. Nuclear bombs are still out there, and massive destruction may result from even a small war. While people have underestimated the resilience of capitalism, they also underestimate its vulnerability. Socialism would not simply be a nice thing. It is necessary if humanity is to go forward. At the same time, it is necessary for us to be clear about our goal, our idea of freedom, our vision of a radically free, democratic, cooperative society run by human beings for human beings. Part of the problem is getting beyond the cynicism, the belief that nothing can be done. One big strike, one general strike, one sit-in would change U.S. politics overnight. All of U.S. politics is organized so that it doesn't happen. The demands of the people are kept limited. Take the Wisconsin events a couple of years ago: if that had become a general strike, it would have changed our politics. Instead, it was channeled into the Democratic Party. The issue is the development of the working-class struggle, which is breaking out but is still at too low a level. The crisis that is going to happen, the movement that is going to develop, will be a combination of the issues of the 1960s and of the 1930s, economic questions together with special oppressions and cultural issues. People will pull together, but it's taking a while. The climate struggle has become the anti-Vietnam War issue of today. I saw a movie recently about organizing in Europe for the last big climate strike there. I was struck by the youth of the organizers. High school students across European countries, a high proportion of them young women, were doing the organizing. So, there's a new generation being radicalized. How it will develop will be different from last time. And it's not just that things go up and down. On one hand, there are out-and-out racist fascists marching in the streets proudly and not even being criticized by the President of the United States. On the other hand, the development of people seeing themselves as socialists. Polls show something between 30-40% of the population is willing to call themselves socialist. It's much higher among young people and even higher among young black people. This is new, the polarization of the Left and the Right. Of course, the extreme fascists, the ones calling themselves Nazis, aren't going to take power, and the socialists aren't very socialist. They don't even want to take away the wealth and power of the capitalist class or even the richest people. Nevertheless, there are openings. Will things develop before there's too much destruction? I have absolutely no idea. I make no predictions. Predictions don't work out too well anyway. But there will be change and upheaval and people looking for alternatives. It's the job of people who see themselves as revolutionary libertarian socialists to find ways of talking to people, to organize ourselves, to make an impact in the movement in society. That's all I can say.**| P**

Transcribed by Mike Atkinson, Efraim Carlebach, Ethan Linehan, Jason Roland, and Duyminh Tran.

1 Hal Draper, "Two Souls of Socialism" *New Politics* (Winter 1966), 57–84. By "Socialism from Below," Price may intend the earlier version of this piece published in *Anvil* in 1960 under the title "Socialism from Below as the Meaning of Socialism."
2 Hal Draper and Max Shachtman, *Two Views of the Cuban Invasion* ([Oakland, CA]: [Hal Draper], 1961).
3 Wayne Price, "In defense of anarchism: A response to Herb Gamber" *PR* 65 (April 2014) <https://platypus1917.org/2014/04/01/defense-anarchism-response-herb-gamberg/>.
4 Ibid.
5 See Wayne Price, "An Anarchist View of State Formation--Review of Peter Gelderloos, *Worshipping Power: An Anarchist View of Early State Formation*" available at https://www.anarkismo.net/article/31226; "An Anarchist View of the Class Theory of the State" available at https://www.anarkismo.net/article/31082; and "Post-Anarchism on the State—An Anarchist Critique" available at https://www.anarkismo.net/article/31126.

The American Revolution and the Left

Chris Cutrone

Presented at a Platypus Affiliated Society public forum panel discussion with Norman Markowitz (CPUSA) and Bertell Ollman at Columbia University on February 22, 2020.

> "We should not fear the 20th century, for this worldwide revolution which we see all around us is part of the original American Revolution."

> "I am delighted to come and visit. Behind the fact of [Fidel] Castro coming to this hotel, [Nikita] Khrushchev coming to Castro, there is another great traveler in the world, and that is the travel of a world revolution, a world in turmoil. I am delighted to come to Harlem and I think the whole world should come here and the whole world should recognize that we all live right next to each other, whether here in Harlem or on the other side of the globe. We should be glad they came to the United States. We should not fear the 20th century, for this worldwide revolution which we see all around us is part of the original American Revolution."
> — Senator John F. Kennedy, speaking at the Hotel Theresa in New York during his 1960 presidential election campaign, October 12, 1960

ANY REVOLUTION IN THE UNITED STATES will express the desire to preserve, sustain and promote the further development of the original American Revolution. The future of socialism, not merely in North America but in the whole world, depends on the fate of the American Revolution. But the "Left" today denies this basic truth.

Marx called the United States Civil War the alarm bell tolling the time of world socialist revolution in the 19th century. That did not happen as he wanted, but the subsequent rise of the massive world-transforming force of American capitalism signaled — and still signals today — the task of socialism.

My old comrades in the Spartacist League had a slogan, "Finish the Civil War!" It was vintage 1960s New Leftism in that it was about the Civil Rights Movement and overcoming *de jure* Jim Crow segregation as a legacy of failed Reconstruction. More than 50 years later, we can say that the task is more simply to complete the American Revolution. Former President John Quincy Adams (the son not the father), speaking before the United States Supreme Court in the Amistad case advocating the freedom of slaves who rebelled, foresaw the future U.S. Civil War over the abolition of slavery and called it "the last battle of the American Revolution." He did not foresee capitalism and its new tasks and future battles.

The American Socialist Eugene Debs famously said that the 4th of July was a socialist holiday and that American Revolutionary figures such as Jefferson and Lincoln belonged to the struggle for socialism — and not to the capitalist political parties of Democrats and Republicans. Today, more than 100 years later, this remains no less true.

Up to the 1960s New Left, the American and global Left and socialists and Communists all used to know this basic truth. — Indeed mainstream capitalist politics acknowledged this fact of the ongoing task of the American Revolution: Kennedy claimed the revolutionary heritage for the U.S. against the Soviet Union; even Nixon in 1968 at the Republican National Convention before his election called for a "new American Revolution."

Today, Bernie Sanders and Trump call themselves not politicians but leaders of a movement; Sanders calls for a "political revolution" in the name of "democratic socialism." What they mean of course is an electoral shift to support new policies. In 1992, when conceding to Bill Clinton's electoral victory after 12 years of Republican rule, George Herbert Walker Bush (the father, not the son) said that the U.S. accomplishes through elections what in other countries requires civil wars.

We are discussing the meaning of the American Revolution for the Left today because we face a general election later this year.

Such elections for the President and Congress, which have stakes at a global and not merely national level, raise issues of the U.S. political system and its foundation in the American Revolution. The future of the American Revolution is at stake.

In the recent Trump impeachment farce, there was at least the pantomime of conflict over the future of the American Republic: Was Trump a threat to the Republic? — Were the Democrats and their allies in the Deep State permanent bureaucracy? There has been an evident crisis of legitimacy of the political order.

Do the rather mild and moderate policy reforms Trump has been implementing and seeks to accomplish amount to a Constitutional crisis — threaten a civil war? Despite the overheated language of the Democrats, Trump's confident and rather blasé attitude, and the matter-of-fact Constitutional arguments by his lawyers and Republican Senators and Congressmen seem appropriate — indeed unimpeachably correct.

What about "fascism"? This favored word on the Left and even among Democrats speaks to the threat of civil war — extra-legal action and perhaps violence. There has been the so-called "resistance" — a term that Attorney General Barr said implied the danger of civil war and even revolution: he also said, in the same speech before the Federalist Society last year, that the U.S. Presidency embodied the "perfected Whig ideal of executive authority" as envisioned by Locke and the English Glorious Revolution — that is, a revolutionary ideal of political authority.

Mao said to Nixon in China that one finds among the left-wing followers of Marx actual fascists. He was contrite about the results of the Cultural Revolution and admitted its pathology. — Today's Maoists and DSA Democratic "socialists" ought to listen and take heed.

It is not a matter of wanting the revolution but rather of its actuality.

The struggle for socialism will not be according to the fevered fantasies of today's supposed "revolutionaries." A socialist revolution will take place — if at all — on the basis of a mass desire to save society, not destroy it. Capitalism will appear as the threat to America, not socialism.

The problem is the exaggerated rhetoric of mainstream politics today. It expresses a partial if distorted truth, that capitalism recurrently produces crises in society, over which political conflicts take place. We are in the midst of such a crisis now — expressed by the crisis of the major capitalist political parties symbolized by Trump and Sanders.

It has happened before. The Great Depression brought a sea-change in American and indeed world politics: in the U.S., a change of the political party system through FDR's New Deal Coalition overturned the more than 50-year post-Civil War and Reconstruction dominance of the Republican Party. The 1960s experienced a new crisis and change of politics with an upheaval among the Democrats and bringing forth not only the New Left but the New Right that triumphed 50 years after the New Deal. 50 years after the 1960s, today we are experiencing another change out of the crisis of the New Right — the crisis of the Reagan Coalition of neoliberalism and neoconservatism and of the culture wars that came out of the New Left and the crisis of American society that followed.

The Democrats have desperately sought to stem the tide of Trumpian post-neoliberalism — and indeed against the swell of support for Bernie Sanders's Democratic "socialism." They have done so on the basis of their prior existing post-60s neoliberal electoral coalition of wealthy progressives, ethno-cultural and/or "racial" minorities, liberally educated women and others, queers and what remains of organized labor. Black Lives Matter, #MeToo and immigrants' rights activists have protested not only against Trump, but have hounded Bernie and his Sandernistas, the much-maligned "Bernie Bros" and Millennial hipster straight white male Brocialists more generally — the "Squad" of Congressional Representatives AOC, Ilhan Omar, Rashida Tlaib and Ayanna Pressley notwithstanding.

Last year's New York Times 1619 Project led by journalist Nikole Hannah-Jones — aimed at delegitimating Trump after the failure of the Russia collusion hoax, in what Editor Dean Baquet called the "shift from Russia to race" — took the occasion of marking the quart-centenary of the arrival of African slaves in the English colonies and explicitly sought to negate the American Revolutionary founding in 1776.

Trump's Presidency seems to prove the invalidity of the American Revolution, and indeed has implied that its meaning was confined to privileged white males who must at all cost be cowed in the public sphere. It seems obvious that women, blacks and other minorities have no stake in and must disavow the American Revolution. The idea of a kind word being said about the American Revolutionaries — the Founding Fathers — nowadays seems importune if not simply a provocative offense and outrage — the Tory Alexander Hamilton's musical fame under Obama notwithstanding.

This is a sad commentary on our historical moment today. It speaks to the utter and complete destruction of the original historical Left, socialism and Marxism — the complete triumph of counterrevolutionary ideology over everything from Classical Liberalism onwards. Such ideology ensures the continuation of capitalism.

However, this is a historical phenomenon only 50 years or so old. And it speaks not to the future but the past. The Millennials blew their chance to relate to history in new ways that challenged and tasked them beyond post-60s doxa.

The problem is that the recent and ongoing crisis of the post-60s neoliberal political order has been expressed either by Trump and his new direction for the Republican Party or by a nostalgic desire to reconstitute the old Democratic Party New Deal Coalition that fell apart a half-century ago, symbolized by the old New Leftist Sanders and the reanimation of the post-60s collapse into the Democratic Socialists of America, both of which date to the Reagan Revolution era of the 1980s and its "resistance" to that time's neoliberal changes in capitalism. This does not augur new possibilities but holds to old memories from a time when many if not most were not yet even alive. Its spectral — unreal — quality is evident.

"The past is not dead; it is not even past." And: "Those who do not learn from history are condemned to repeat it" — are condemned to be trapped by it. These banal catch-phrases can hide but also reveal a meaningful truth: that we are tasked by history, whether or not we recognize it. American history continues, regardless. The U.S. President is indeed, as is said, "the leader of the free world." As Trump says, America is the greatest country in world history; as his impeachment prosecution declared, his Senate jury is the "highest deliberative body in the history of the world." This is simply — and undeniably — true. Why and how it was constituted so, historically, is an unavoidable fact of life, for people here and around the world, now and for the foreseeable future. — Can we live up to its task?

My own rejoinder to Trump's Make America Great Again is to Make America Revolutionary Again. — But no one else on the Left seems to be seeing the sign of the times. Instead, everyone seems eager to rescue the neoliberal Democrats from the dustbin of history. Even Bernie must genuflect to their PC orthodoxy. — But not Trump!

This is indeed a time of reconsideration of history and its haunting memories. The question is whether they must, as Marx said, remain "traditions of dead generations weighing like a nightmare on the brains of the living," or can they be redeemed by the struggle for freedom in the present. It seems that the Millennial Left of the last two decades has joined the dead generations that came before it. Any rebirth of a true socialist Left and of a Marxist recognition of its actual tasks and possibilities must reckon with the history that has been abandoned by recent generations, starting at least since the 1960s, and pursue its unfulfilled potential.

For the American Revolution still lives.**| P**

What would Tom Paine advocate today?

Robert Meeropol

What follows is a slightly revised version of a talk given in Amherst, MA. on January 25, 2020 sponsored by the organization Tom Paine Friends, in honor of what would have been Tom Paine's 283rd birthday. Robert Meeropol is the founder and retired Executive Director of the Rosenberg Fund for Children.

MY FAVORITE QUOTE FROM TOM PAINE IS, *"The world is my country, all mankind are my brethren, and to do good is my religion."*[1] I would change "mankind" to "humankind," but otherwise that quote is close to a succinct summary of my worldview.

I'm not a big fan of ideological labels. Describing people as socialists, capitalists, communists, anarchists, or some other "ist," often obscures, rather than clarifies, their beliefs. However, if you called me a Tom Paine-ist, you wouldn't be far off the mark.

What would Tom Paine or a Tom Paine-ist advocate today?

I use the word "advocate" because that's who Tom Paine was. He didn't mount the barricades. He didn't fight in an army. He used his pen to promote actions and support policies. During the American Revolution his pen turned out to be mightier than many British swords and canons. So, what would he advocate today?

It is safe to say that Tom Paine knew nothing about climate change, but I think that he would advocate for what environmental groups such as the Sunrise Movement and Extinction Rebellion are saying and doing. More about this later.

As a person of the enlightenment, someone who elevated reason and science, he would argue first for applying our scientific knowledge to make a realistic assessment of what we face. Given that climate change is a global problem that must be tackled by all people, everywhere, advocating for revolutionary change in order to achieve global sustainability is exactly what someone would do who believed in doing good for the entire world and all people who live upon it.

I don't know how much Paine knew about environmental interactions and so do not know if he understood that doing good for all people also requires doing good by the plants and animals we share the planet with. But as an enlightenment man of reason and science, if he were alive today, he would quickly reach that conclusion.

So, what is a realistic assessment of what we face? Most of us have heard a lot of about bigger storms, worse droughts, hotter temperatures, coupled with more erratic weather in general. We've also heard about sea level rise and catastrophic weather events causing tens, even hundreds, of millions of climate refugees, and that this will cause widespread misery, social chaos and war.

I hate to say it, but that's a sugar-coated assessment. Once we cross a certain threshold (the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and the Paris accords put that number at 1.5 and 2 degrees Celsius, or approximately between 2 and 3 degrees Fahrenheit) we will trigger a self-perpetuating cycle of temperature increases that we can do nothing to stop. That will result in several more degrees of warming.

If that happens, massive methane releases will poison our atmosphere, growing food will become close to impossible and most drinkable fresh water will vanish. In other words, we won't be able to breath the air, drink the water and there will be no food. That's what we face and that's why it is no exaggeration to say we face an existential crisis.

Why hasn't it been presented to us in this manner? I'll quote from an essay Jonathan Franzen published in the *New Yorker* last September that begins to explain this. He wrote that avoiding this kind of talk is not surprising, "Psychologically, this denial makes sense. Despite the outrageous fact that I'll soon be dead forever, I live in the present, not the future. Given a choice between an alarming abstraction (death) and the reassuring evidence of my senses (breakfast!) my mind prefers to focus on the latter."[2] So do we all....

We shake our heads and express sorrow and sympathy for the animal and plant victims of the Australian fires. But we don't give a thought about it happening here. The recent firestorms in northern Alberta, in California, and now Australia will not be confined to those areas as the weather becomes hotter and more erratic. Once we cross the threshold I described a few moments ago, and possibly even before, it will become inevitable that our forests will burn just like those in California and Australia. I'm not predicting this will happen in hundreds of years; I predict that sometime in the next several decades our forests will burn. Imagine our Valley in the midst of a firestorm.

And firestorm is a good word for it, because these fires are so potent that they create their own weather. Meteorologists have observed an unprecedented type of cloud formation during the Alberta and Australian fires. Their technical name is *pyrocumulonimbus* clouds. They are caused by the energy released during the fires and create lightning, thunder and tornado-like winds that spread burning embers over long distances. Australians have begun to call them fire clouds. None of us want to imagine them in our Valley.

Scientists are human and not necessarily politically astute. Back in 1988 head NASA scientist James Hansen publicly predicted what has happened since and what we are facing. He might have also been correct at that time when he said that if we attacked the problem immediately and applied our collective political will we could turn this around. But the world's weather seemed benign at the time, and powerful economic and political forces reacted by creating the vast array of climate denial propaganda that plagues us to this day.

All the scientists could think to do, as it became less likely that we could turn this around, was to scream more shrilly that we must act and that it isn't too late. They said it in 1990, in 2000, in 2010 and during every year since. That didn't help as the decades rolled by. People could rationalize: you said the sky was falling in 1988, you have said it over and over again for 30 years and the sky is still up there. Until the last few years, such skepticism helped delay the realization that Hansen was right.

Some scientists came to believe it was too late and gave up in despair. Others, and this goes well beyond scientists, educated themselves and understood what was happening, but became reluctant to tell the whole truth because it was so dire and overwhelming that they feared it would discourage action.

And this last fear is a very real one. When I bring this up, a common response is, "What a downer." Yes, confronting the horror we face is a downer, but isn't making a comment like that designed to shut off discussion? Isn't it in fact a form of climate change denial? It says, let's not talk about this. But if we don't talk about it, how can we address it? Tom Paine would say we must mobilize the masses on a global scale in order to make our best efforts to combat this. He would be the last person to say don't talk or write about it.

If I accomplish one thing today, I hope that no one who hears this talk will ever try to stifle climate change related discussion by saying it's a downer. And better still, if you hear someone else say it, confront them about it.

As a political strategist Tom Paine would also make a realistic political assessment. His application of the science to our political situation would lead him to conclude we are unlikely to change the global power structure quickly enough to avoid crossing the thresholds I talked about before. However, Paine never shied away from taking on long odds, so I bet, confronted with this crisis, he would pen a pamphlet. Perhaps he would title it "Environmental Common Sense." In this pamphlet he would outline how to make our most effective effort to save ourselves and the productive capacity of the planet.

I mentioned the Extinction Rebellion before. XR, as it calls itself, started in the UK and has been engaging in a range of non-violent civil disruptions. Their actions have included blocking intersections and bridges in cities across the globe to demand that all governments declare a climate emergency and make addressing the problem their top priority. Tom Paine would recognize the need for mass revolutionary action. He would say that common sense demands we support and join them.

What kind of change would he urge? As a revolutionary who looked at social structure as a whole, he would urge that our survival now depends on transforming our basic social ethic from competition to cooperation. He would see the need to place the environment over profit and the economy. He would note that sustainability, rather than growth, must be our guide-star.

How much time do we have? If we don't turn things around in the next ten years, how long before we blow through the threshold that will generate self-perpetuating changes that we will be unable to stop and render the planet virtually uninhabitable?

Scientists tell us that it takes thirty years to feel the full impact of the greenhouse gases we've pumped into the atmosphere in any given year, and that in the last 30 years we've pumped as much greenhouse gases into the atmosphere as we did in the previous 150 years. During those 150 years we increased global temperatures by one degree Celsius, so it is reasonable to project that we'll reach the two-degree Celsius threshold by the time we feel the full effect of the gases we've pumped into the atmosphere since 1990. That is around 2050, but, of course, such dates are hard to pin down exactly.

A very well-connected and well-funded British think tank, the Breakthrough Institute, has produced a policy paper that sheds further light on how much time we have. As an aside, I don't like a lot of what they do because they see nuclear power and other technological fixes as solutions. They believe that we can get out of the mess industrial technology has gotten us into by applying even more industrial technology. I think that's absurd. One of the definitions of insanity is the belief that you can do the same thing you've been doing and produce a different result. However, their position papers present the clearest picture of what we will face and when we will face it.

They point out that the world has several major bread baskets: the U.S./Canadian plains, and the rice bowls of China and India, along with rich agricultural river deltas like the Mekong and Nile. They predict that climate change could lead to the simultaneous crop failure of all of them by 2050. Once that happens, we will face global societal breakdown. I'll have to live to over 100 to experience it, or more likely die by it, but I fear for my children, their children, and the younger generation. Blowing through the 2-degree Celsius threshold will generate at least another two degrees of warming, bringing the total to four degrees Celsius. About that, the report says, "[Scientist] Kevin Anderson says a 4°C future 'is incompatible with an organized global community....'" and that "World Bank reports 'there is no certainty that adaptation to a 4°C world is possible'"[3] The World Bank is hardly a radical organization.

Given this time frame, Paine would recognize that every day counts, but he'd also acknowledge that, although we must try, any progress we can make during the ten years the scientists claim we have to drastically cut our emissions probably won't prevent us from crossing the self-perpetuating threshold of further temperature rise. However, since it might, it would still be worth pursuing.

He'd also acknowledge that it might not, so it would be wise to brace ourselves for all the nastiness that is coming down the pike. Again, a quote from Jonathan Franzen's article illuminates what I mean by this. Franzen writes that if we can't win the battle against climate change outright, "other kinds of action take on greater meaning. Preparing for fires and floods and refugees is a directly pertinent example. But the impending catastrophe heightens the urgency of almost any world-improving action. In times of increasing chaos, people seek protection in tribalism and armed force. rather than the rule of law, and our defense against this kind of dystopia is to maintain functioning democracies, functioning legal systems, and functioning communities. In this respect any movement towards a more just and civil society can now be considered a meaningful climate action. Securing fair elections is a climate action. Combating extreme wealth inequality is a climate action. Shutting down the hate machines on social media is a climate action. Instituting a humane immigration policy, advocating for racial and gender equality [...] these are all meaningful climate actions."[4]

I doubt Tom Paine knew much about social media, but he wrote about and advocated for every other progressive action mentioned in the quoted language. For instance, in *Common Sense*, Paine saw our emerging nation as an asylum for the persecuted lovers of civil and religious liberty. He'd be turning over in his grave if he saw what is happening today to the American human rights haven he dreamed of.

That means that efforts like providing sanctuary for an undocumented man not only support human rights but are climate actions as well. And the same can be said for community efforts to aid refugees, support permaculture farming, offer anti-racist training, promote workers' rights and build neighborhood support networks.

What would Tom Paine say about the 2020 election? He wrote, "Men who look upon themselves born to reign, and others to obey, soon grow insolent; selected from the rest of mankind their minds are early poisoned by importance; and the world they act in differs so materially from the world at large, that they have but little opportunity of knowing its true interests, and when they succeed to the government are frequently the most ignorant and unfit of any throughout the dominions."[5]

Tom Paine died well over a hundred years before Donald Trump was born, but he still described him to a tee.

Consider the Democratic Party, I think he would analyze the political and economic forces arrayed against those working to prevent environmental collapse and quickly realize that only those willing to directly confront American and global extractionist corporations are proposing policies that just might save us. There are only two viable current candidates who fit this mold, Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren. I think Paine would favor Sanders over Warren because, despite the major grass roots campaign Warren is mounting, she's basically a regulator. That's a top down perspective, while Sanders stakes his ability to make change on building a bottom up mass movement, and Paine was a promoter of revolutionary mass movements. Still, Paine was a political realist and despite his preference for Sanders, would have been willing to support Warren if she became the nominee because she supports necessary basic change as well.

Injecting my own opinion: I believe a Sanders/Warren ticket would be best. I think that combined they have a better chance of beating Trump, and that having a bottom up organizer and a top-down regulator working in tandem would be an excellent combination.

And I think Paine would argue that it must be *now*. That we have run out of time. I think we can agree that if Trump is reelected, we will blow through the 2-degree threshold more quickly and the future of the human race, and all complex life forms on the planet, looks bleak. But I think Paine would also recognize that even if we dump Trump, which would be a good thing, if we replace him with a corporate-oriented democrat we won't gain what is necessary to save us.

Why is that? The scientists say we have ten years, but while most of their predictions have been accurate, things have gotten worse more quickly than they predicted. Thus, eight, rather than ten years, to turn things around may be a more prudent assessment. If we elect a corporate Democrat, that person may reverse some of Trump's worst policies, but he or she will not make the basic changes needed to reduce greenhouse gas production. In that case, we lose four of our precious eight years. And, of course, that corporate Democrat will run again in 2024, and his or her Republican opponent will be even worse than whoever that is. So even if that Democrat wins again in 2024, it will be 2028 before any of the necessary changes are even in the planning stage and by then it will be too late. That's why electing Warren or Sanders is so essential. If we elect any other Democrat, we'll be jumping out of the fire but into the frying pan.

That's the beginning of an outline of what I believe Tom Paine would write in *Environmental Common Sense*, but I want to leave you with one final thought.

What does it mean to say "the world is my country"? If the world is your country, it means you do not give your allegiance to any particular country. It means that you don't believe in nationalism. It means that you don't elevate any nation above others. It means that patriotism is obsolete, except in the sense that you express your love for your country, by taking actions to benefit all countries including your own. And because we face an urgent global crisis that requires global cooperation, Tom Paine's basic philosophy, *"The world is my country, all mankind are my brethren, and to do good is my religion,"* has never been more timely.**| P**

1 Thomas Paine, *Rights of Man* (1791).
2 Jonathan Franzen, "What if we stopped pretending?" *New Yorker*, 2019 <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/cultural-comment/what-if-we-stopped-pretending\>.
3 David Spratt and Ian Dunlop, "What Lies Beneath: The understatement of existential climate risk," *Breakthrough* (2018) <https://www.breakthroughonline.org.au/publications/>.
4 Franzen, "What if we stopped pretending?"
5 Thomas Paine, *Common Sense* (1776).

Jobs and free stuff

Chris Cutrone

THE CURRENT POLITICAL POLARIZATION in the U.S. is not Democrat vs. Republican or the minorities of race, gender and sexuality against straight white men: It is between the politics of free stuff vs. the politics of jobs — demands for more free stuff vs. demands for more jobs.[1]

"Democratic socialist" candidate for Democratic Party nomination for President Bernie Sanders has responded to charges that he is actually a communist with the assertion that the U.S. is already socialist, but it is a socialism for billionaires. The kernel of truth in this is that there is already government subsidy and other kinds of support for capital. The question is, why is this so? Corruption? Or rather is it actually in the interest of society? Of course it is the latter — the general interest of capitalist society, which both Parties serve (as best they can).

Karl Marx observed that the productive activities of general social cooperation are a "free gift to capital." What did he mean? The social process of production is not at all reducible to the paid wage-labor of capitalist employees, but includes the activity of everyone in society. As Frankfurt School Director Max Horkheimer wrote, in "The little man and the philosophy of freedom," "All those who work and even those who don't, have a share in the creation of contemporary reality."[2]

Whether in terms of Andrew Yang's proposed "freedom dividend" of free money for all in a UBI or free public education and health care for all, the question is not who's going to pay for it, but rather how can capital make use of it. These are not anti-capitalist demands but demands for the better functioning of capital. The question is, what are we going to do in our society with all the fruits of our production — with all our free stuff? How can we make it benefit everyone? Is it just a matter of better shaving off more crumbs?

Yang proposes that the invaluable but currently unpaid labor of mothers, inventors and artists should be supported by society. Marx called this the communism of the principle of "from each according to ability, to each according to need" in a society in which the "freedom of each is the precondition for the freedom of all." We already live in capitalism according to this principle, but capital fails to fulfill it.

The Democrats propose to make capital fulfill its social responsibility; the Republicans think it already does so as best as possible, and any attempts at government intervention to make it do better no matter how well intentioned the reforms will actually be counterproductive. The result will be stagnation and lack of growth, undermining society along with capital. Without people working there can be no greater social benefits of production; without jobs there can be no free stuff.

This is the essential difference in U.S. politics or really in capitalist politics everywhere: progressive capitalism vs. conservative capitalism. Not spendthrift vs. frugality or kindheartedness vs. cynicism or liberality vs mean-spiritedness, nor is it optimism vs. pessimism or idealism vs. realism. It is a division of labor in debate over advocating how to keep people working and how to distribute freely the products of their labor. It is not a difference in principle or one of honesty vs. deception: both sides are sincere — and both sides are self-deceiving.

Marx observed that the free gift to capital is the "general social intellect." But that general social intellect has become the "automatic subject" of capital. How do we make it serve us, instead of us serving it? All politicians in capitalism want the same thing. The problem is that capitalist politics is not as intelligent as the society it represents. This is the true meaning of socialist politics — to realize the general social intellect — which today unfortunately is inevitably just a form of capitalist politics, whether by Sanders, Yang or Trump. They all want to better serve us — which means better serving capital. | **P**

1 See my "Robots and sweatshops" as well as "Why not Trump again?," *Platypus Review* 123 (February 2020); and "The end of the Gilded Age: Discontents of the Second Industrial Revolution today," *PR* 102 (December 2017 – January 2018) and "The future of socialism: What kind of illness is capitalism?," *PR* 105 (April 2018), available online at: <https://platypus1917.org/2020/02/01/robots-and-sweatshops/>, <https://platypus1917.org/2020/02/01/why-not-trump-again/>, <https://platypus1917.org/2017/12/02/end-gilded-age-discontents-second-industrial-revolution-today/> and <https://platypus1917.org/2018/04/01/the-future-of-socialism-what-kind-of-illness-is-capitalism/>.
2 Horkheimer, *Dawn & Decline: Notes 1926–31 and 1950–69* (New York: Seabury, 1978, 51.